



March 6, 2015

Talking Points for HB 358 (as amended)

Sponsored by Ryan Lynch

This bill would transfer authority over Licensed Addiction Counselors (LACs) from the Department of Labor & Industry to the Board of Social Work Examiners and Professional Counselors, which is being renamed the Board of Behavioral Health. The bill would require applicants for licensure to submit to a background check.

After it passed the House, Representative Lynch met with members of the Board and representatives of the Associations of LACs, Licensed Clinical Social Workers (LCSWs), Licensed Clinical Professional Counselors (LCPCs), and Licensed Marriage and Family Therapists (LMFTs) to discuss amending the bill in the Senate. Representative Lynch agreed to amend the bill. As amended, H.B. 358 would expand the board to nine members, adding two LACs and requiring that one of the LCSWs or LCPCs be dually licensed as an LMFT. The amendment would also provide for registration of addiction counselor licensure candidates who have completed their education but have not met the experience or exam requirements for licensure.

- This Board currently licenses and provides oversight of LCSWs, LCPCs, and LMFTs. There are currently 808 LCSWs; 1198 LCPCs, and 156 LMFTs, under the jurisdiction of this Board. Certification of addiction counselors began in 1980 at the Department of Institutions and in 1997 addiction counselors were recognized and provisions for awarding licensure status of these behavioral health professionals were put in place.
- Since this time, the LAC profession has been regulated as a Program directly under the jurisdiction of the Department of Labor and Industry, and oversight was provided directly by Department staff. There are currently 650 LACs being provided oversight in this manner, without the benefit of having a Board comprised of professionals to assist with regulation and administrative rules oversight.
- LACs are an important provider of behavioral health services in the State of Montana and they would benefit from full recognition of their status as licensed providers by representation and oversight by a board. The behavioral health professionals profoundly affect the lives of people

of Montana. It is the Board's purpose to provide for the common good by ensuring the ethical, qualifications and professional practice of all credentials housed under the board. Regulation through licensure serves the public interest by protecting society's most vulnerable individuals, those who live with mental illness.

- The addition of LACs to the current Board of Social Work Examiners and Professional Counselors would place the majority of behavioral health professionals under the jurisdiction of a single board. This is not only economical but will provide for consistency and a mechanism to advocate for continuity and collaboration in these behavioral health services for the citizens of Montana.
- A work group, convened by Representative Lynch and Senator Cohenour met on February 18, 2015, to develop an amended position to the original HB358 that was acceptable to all parties as being representative of the various professions to be under jurisdiction of the Board should the bill pass. This work group included designated representatives of the Board of Social Work Examiners and Professional Counselors, the Montana Chapter of NAADAC representing LAC's, the Montana Behavioral Health Practitioner Network that represents the following practitioners: LCSWs, LCPCs, and LMFTs, the Governor's Office and Department, and Senator Cohenour and Representative Lynch. The amended bill reflects the deliberations of this group.
- The bill, as amended provides for representation of approximately 2800 licensees. A nine member board would provide solid representation of all license types and realistically address any anticipated work load.
- The Board of Social Work Examiners and Professional Counselors has endorsed this bill as amended.
- The Montana chapter of NAADAC has endorsed this bill as amended.
- The Montana Behavioral Health Practitioner Network has endorsed this bill as amended.
- The Department and Governor's Office has endorsed this bill as amended.
- We recommend a do pass on HB358 as amended.

Thank you for your consideration of HB358 as amended. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact us.

Respectfully submitted for the Board:

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